



Dr. Wayne Halstrom

“The profession has a vested interest in the financial success of all of its members.”

The Evolution Continues

It's fair to say that no one grows up dreaming about becoming president of the Canadian Dental Association. Rather, it's an evolutionary process that begins with an initial involvement in organized dentistry and continues as your professional interests and experience grow. Now that my time as CDA president is here, I am both humbled and proud of being granted this opportunity.

Reflecting on the CDA presidents with whom I have served, I am struck by the enormity of the task ahead. No shoes will be larger to fill than those of Dr. Jack Cottrell — a most dedicated and capable leader. Dr. Cottrell served his profession through one of the most volatile periods in CDA history, carrying himself with a determination and dignity that earned him the endearing respect of his colleagues and friends.

My time in dentistry has been a roller-coaster ride. I practised for 20 years, then took a hiatus from dental activities to manage business interests before choosing to return to full-time practice. During this 5-year interval as a traditional “business person,” I developed a special appreciation for the members of our profession. Being immersed in a world where integrity and forthrightness are little known commodities taught me to appreciate the high level of professionalism that exists in dentistry.

While I have always maintained that a healthy dental practice must also be a healthy business, the 2 are not mutually exclusive. Our practice environment is evolving. The financial pressures on our newly graduated dentists present special challenges. How long must one be an associate dentist before there is sufficient financial recovery from debt accumulated at school to actually start up or purchase an independent practice?

I believe the profession itself needs to become more involved in the future financial success of its new members. Poor or ineffective management of the financial affairs of newly graduated

dentists will result in a smaller number of potential buyers of the practices owned by members approaching retirement. While this may be somewhat of a self-serving goal, the profession has a vested interest in the financial success of all of its members.

Financial success and business management go hand in hand. Dentistry has fought a long and successful battle against outside business interests becoming involved in the profession. Managed care, while the hallmark of practice models in many areas of the United States, has had no successful foothold in Canada. The problems that exist with the National Health Service for dentists in the United Kingdom are not found in this country. Avoiding these situations has not been a happy accident but can be traced back to our organizations supporting their members while promoting financial management and good practice performance.

Delivery of a suite of services that are tangible and useful to members is a primary goal of CDA. I believe these services should include those that allow senior members of the profession to play more of a mentoring role toward new members. For instance, the development of formal mentorship or business training programs at the local, regional or national level should be further explored. The debt load that our fledging dentists are harnessed with is real, but the knowledge and skills they need to manage this burden have yet to be acquired.

Having spent the last 8 years observing the CDA presidents who preceded me, I realize that the demands of the coming year are great. However, I look forward to the challenges. Being tasked with the responsibility of speaking for and representing Canadian dentists is a very special opportunity and one that I will not take lightly. The evolution of my involvement in dentistry continues and I am excited about the next part of the journey.

Wayne Halstrom, BA, DDS
president@cda-adc.ca